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By 2nd Lt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel

Alaska Guard biathletes shine with women's team making national debut, medaling

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — The Alaska National Guard biathlon team arrived home with medals in tow after competing in the 2019 Chief, National Guard Bureau Biathlon Championships at Camp Ethan Allen Training Site, Jericho, Vt., from Feb. 23 – 28.

While the AKNG men's team have competed and placed in previous championships, this was the first time the women's team participated in the team events and began their legacy with a second place finish in the relay race.

"The women's team exceeded expectations with all team members racing in the masters division," said Capt. Julie Kane, a nurse practitioner with the Alaska Army National Guard's Medical Detachment and second year competitor, who explained that most of her team members were beginners at the sport. "It felt amazing being part of the women's team [after competing alone the previous year] and representing the great state of Alaska at the national level."

The men's team continued with their history of success with Pfc. Everett Darrow placing second in the pursuit race and along with Maj. David Cunningham, both were awarded All Guard Team honors. Missing from the men's team was Army Guard Spc. Travis Cooper as he was racing in Europe at the time of the Guard championships.

"Spc. Cooper was picked up by the US Biathlon Association and racing at the world cup events in Minsk, Belarus and Otepaeae, Estonia," said Staff Sgt. Jack Androski, the team coach and a mortarman with 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment. "He would have contributed greatly to the AKNG team's success, but we are excited to have him represent our team and state at numerous world cup events."

Despite missing one of their signature biathletes and facing difficult conditions including high winds and extremely cold temperatures, Androski said that all the competitors performed commendably.

"Wind gusts reached 35 mph making safety a concern for offhand shooting," said Androski, a second-year competitor at the national level event. "Elements can make the sport more challenging and even cause races to be altered to ensure the safety of all participants."

Biathlon is an event that pairs cross-country skiing with marksmanship and winning is dependent upon speed on skis and rifle accuracy.

"As the Army aims to increase combat readiness, I cannot think of a better way than promoting biathlon as a means to achieve this goal," said Kane, who has been a member of the AKARNG for five years. "The Army's shoot, move, and communicate parallels biathlon."

Androski says that biathlon training improves both athletic ability and marksmanship – by having to hit a target with your heart racing at 130 beats per minute.

More than 125 National Guardsmen from 18 states competed in the national week-long event.

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PHOTOS

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.

2. **Facebook link** includes a post with the complete selection of full-resolution, free downloadable images. (May not be accessible from all military computers.)

https://www.facebook.com/pg/AlaskaNationalGuard/photos/?tab=album&album_id=10157068752156796

3. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution photos. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.) <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/314516/alaska-guard-biathletes-shine-with-womens-team-making-national-debut-medaling>



U.S. Army Maj. David Cunningham, Alaska National Guard, competes in the 2019 Chief, National Guard Bureau Biathlon Championship Master Men's Pursuit Race, Camp Ethan Allen Training Site, Jericho, Vt., Feb. 25, 2019. The CNGB Championships consist of the sprint, pursuit, patrol, and relay race. (U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Officer Candidate Nathan Rivard)



Staff Sgt. Heather Percy, left, and Lt. Col. Safiya Ingram, compete in the 2019 Chief, National Guard Bureau Biathlon Championship Patrol Race, Camp Ethan Allen Training Site, Jericho, Vt., Feb. 28, 2019. The CNGB Championships consist of the sprint, pursuit, patrol, and relay race. (U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Officer Candidate Nathan Rivard)



Athletes compete in the 2019 Chief, National Guard Bureau Biathlon Championship Patrol Race, Camp Ethan Allen Training Site, Jericho, Vt., Feb. 28, 2019. The CNGB Championships consist of the sprint, pursuit, patrol, and relay race. (U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Officer Candidate Nathan Rivard)



Members of the Alaska National Guard Biathlon Team proudly display the Alaska Flag at the 2019 Chief, National Guard Bureau Biathlon Championship at Camp Ethan Allen Training Site, Jericho, Vt., Feb. 28, 2019. The CNGB Championships consist of the sprint, pursuit, patrol, and relay race. (U.S. Army National Guard Photo by Officer Candidate Nathan Rivard)



Staff Sgt. Heather Percy, left, Lt. Col. Safiya Ingram, and Capt. Julie Kane are presented with silver medals for their second place finish in the relay race at the 2019 Chief, National Guard Bureau Biathlon Championship at Camp Ethan Allen Training Site, Jericho, Vt., Feb. 28, 2019. The CNGB Championships consist of the sprint, pursuit, patrol, and relay race. (U.S. Army National Guard courtesy photo)